

Crucial Times Ahead—

Writer Sees Great Responsibility for Times on Land Issue

July 9, 1967

Dear Howard,

Senator Gruening's introduction of S. 2020 offers Alaska's Native people their most important opportunity in a century to rally public support for a fair and equitable settlement of their land claims.

The Tundra Times unquestionably has been the most important single factor in bringing the issue to the forefront in Alaska and in uniting the Native people politically and spiritually in a common effort to win recognition of their rights, their needs, and their hopes.

The next several months, the next year or two, will be the most crucial period in the history of Alaska Native affairs and the decisions that are made will affect all Alaskans for generations to come.

The Tundra Times has a great responsibility and a greatness to match its responsibility.

William Byler,
Executive Director,
Association on American Indian Affairs

Leader Believes AFN Can Be Potent Vehicle

723 West 10th Street
Juneau, Alaska 99801

July 10, 1967

Letter to the Editor
Tundra Times
P.O. Box 1287
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

The Alaska Federation of Natives has the potential to be a potent vehicle for actions beneficial to both its members and, as a consequence, to all Alaskans. But it can do this effectively only with the active backing of its members and the understanding of its fundamental principles by those not yet committed to its support.

Alaska's native peoples have long been, in many areas, the passive recipients of various programs developed for them. They now have the opportunity to become the authors of changes beneficial to them. It does not derogate from the fundamental purposes of governmental programs to state that our direct participation is necessary if the benefits are to be lasting and significant.

Beneficiaries of land claims proceedings generally establish eligibility by reference to blood quantum and compliance with enrollment procedures. The definition of individual rights seem deceptively simple at this point. As a result, the prospective beneficiary tends to forget that collective pressures are helping to shape the provisions of enabling legislation and will be effective in ensuring that provisions for the disposition of compensation and procedures under which the land will be administered are in accord with our wishes.

Senate Concurrent Resolution 11 (U.S. Congress 2/17/67) states, "...the necessary constructive programs and services (will be) directed to the governing bodies of these groups for application in their respective communities, offering self-determination and self-help features for the people involved..." Other federal legislation, dealing with education, revolving funds and other financing, economic development, etc., clearly demonstrates that the present indications of enlightenment in Congressional attitudes can best be encouraged by the continued application of pressure through collective effort by the native people.

On the state level, recent legislation makes provisions for hearings at which time the needs, wishes, and problems of the Alaskan Natives will be explored, (see House Concurrent Resolution No. 3 and House Bill No. 277).

The Office of Economic Opportunity is, through A.S.C.A.P. leadership and administration, making available, programs not presently funded through usual sources. Their success depends on the understanding, participation, and support by people in the target areas.

Efforts are presently being formulated in the fields relative to our history and heritage with specific programming aimed at the collection of artifacts, stories on tapes, photographs,

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AFN Can Be Potent . . .

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etc. These efforts, occurring at various levels, deserve our support and require our leadership.

In a speech delivered before the Board of Directors at the Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc., at its annual meeting in New York City on May 8, 1967, Alaska's Senator E.L. (Bob) Bartlett stated, "In the relatively short time Alaska natives have increased the power of their vote, they have shaken our old ways of doing things. In using the power of the vote to achieve just goals they have once again demonstrated that this nation has built into its governmental system the weapons with which to wage rebellions so necessary to political life. They have reminded us that there are no angles in the form of kings to rule men, only men to govern other men as equals."

Many of these programs were initiated in response to the formation and vigorous demands of a statewide organization. Others use the organizations as a point of reference for direction. The realization of these proposals will depend on our willingness to work hard in supporting our elected leaders and our organizations.

Our committees can to the extent possible, assume some of the workload in between meetings. Several of the chairmen are doing an excellent job - more can be done, especially during the summer season. Preliminary work can be done with regard to constitutional revision.

The Alaska Federation of Natives has made its impact in Congress and on the state level. It is up to us to make it work so that we can achieve, with a full measure of dignity and unity of purpose, the equality of opportunity necessary to our progress. I urge your support of the A.F.N. and your local organizations.

John Borkbridge, Jr.
Member
Board of Directors
Alaska Federation of Natives